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# SEEKERS

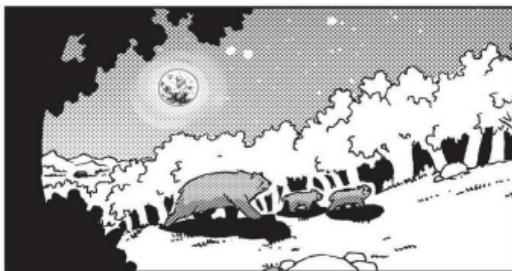
TOKLO'S STORY



ERIN HUNTER

# SEEKERS

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***Seekers: Toklo's Story***  
Created by Erin Hunter  
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♦  
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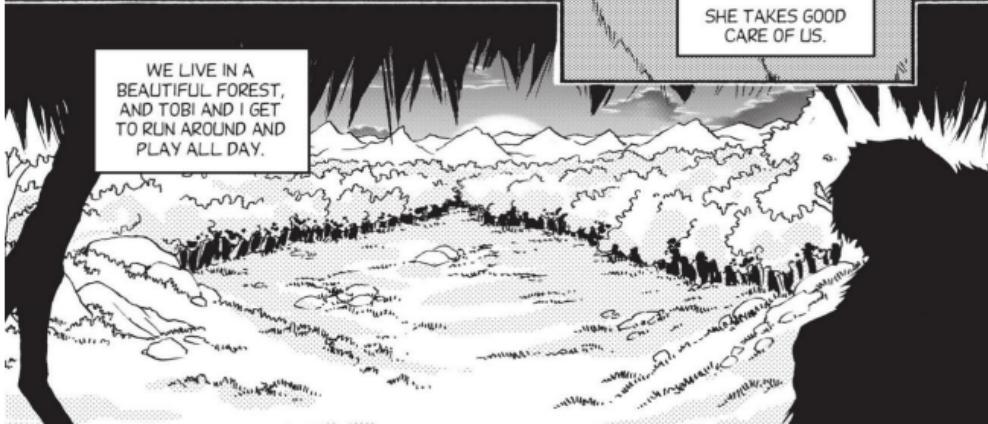
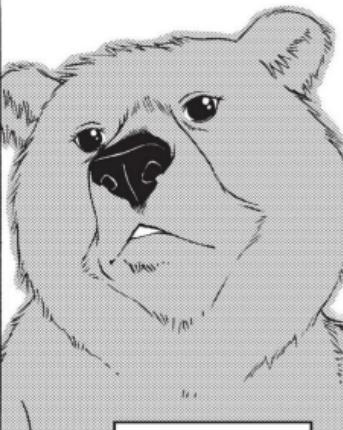


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MY NAME'S TOKLO. MY BROTHER'S NAME IS TOBI, AND OUR MOTHER IS CALLED OKA.



WE LIVE IN A BEAUTIFUL FOREST, AND TOBI AND I GET TO RUN AROUND AND PLAY ALL DAY.



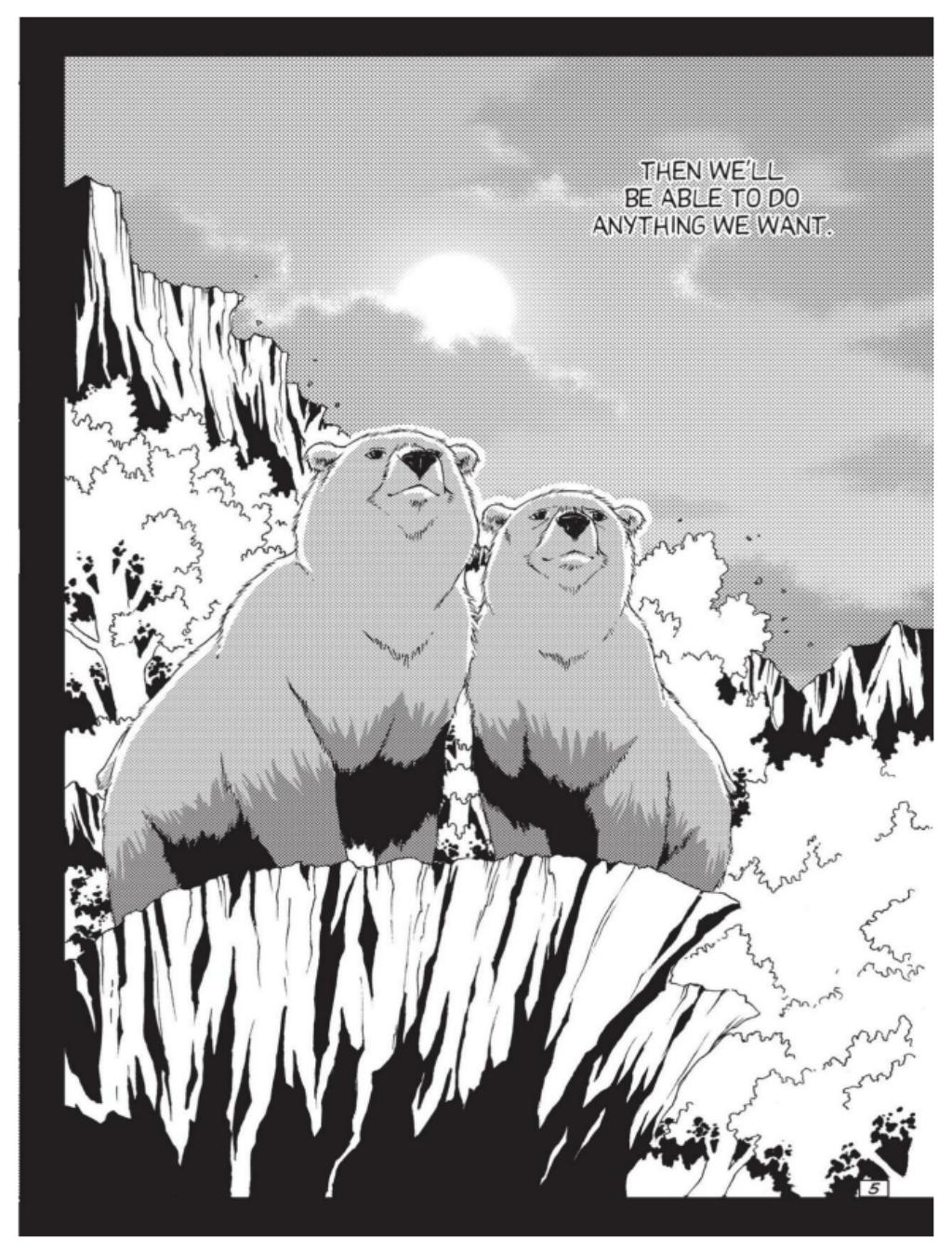
SHE TAKES GOOD CARE OF US.



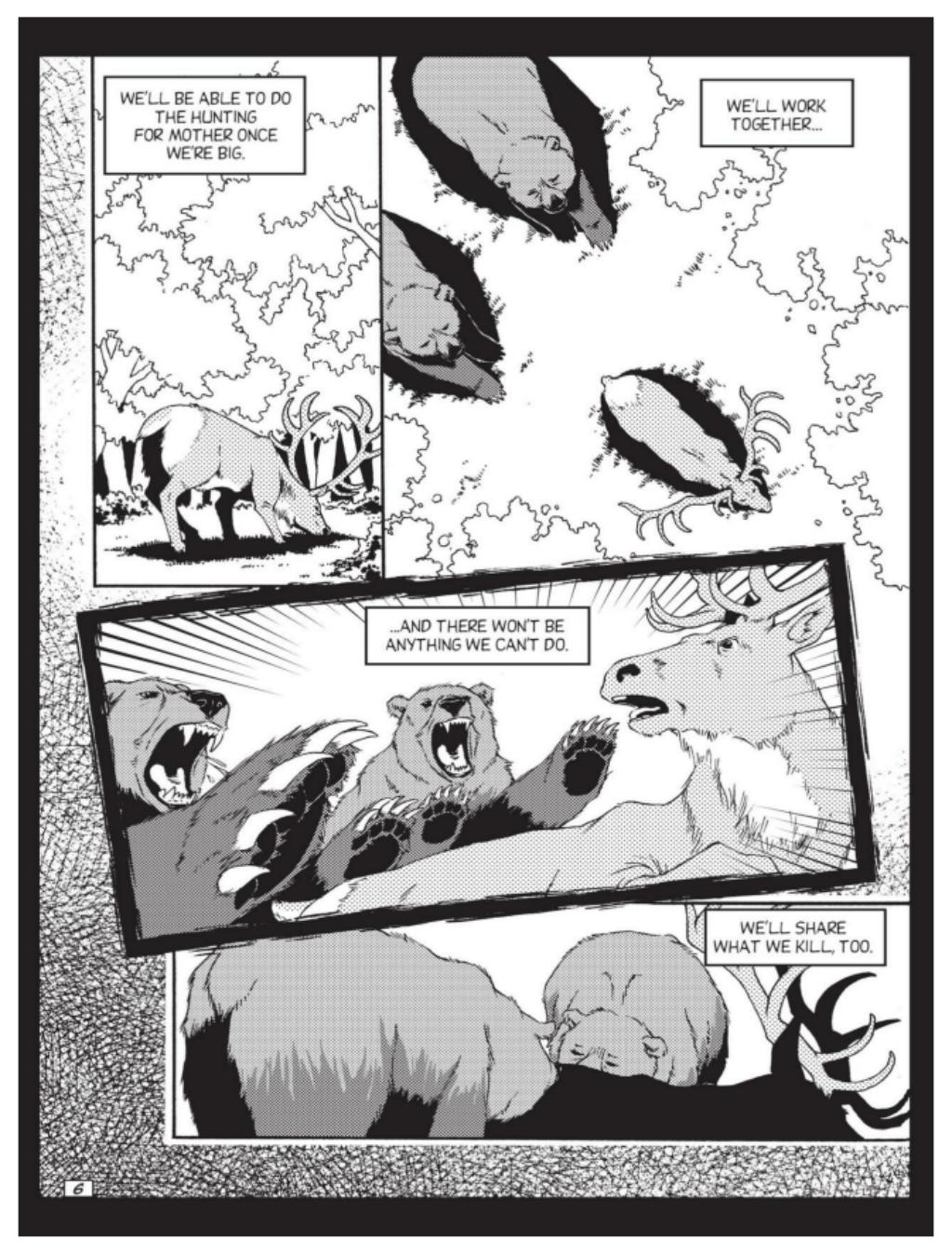
MOTHER SAYS WE'RE STILL TOO SMALL TO DO A LOT OF THINGS... LIKE GO HUNTING 'CAUSE WE'RE ONLY ONE MOON OLD.



BUT SOON WE'RE BOTH GONNA BE BIG.



THEN WE'LL  
BE ABLE TO DO  
ANYTHING WE WANT.



WE'LL BE ABLE TO DO  
THE HUNTING  
FOR MOTHER ONCE  
WE'RE BIG.

WE'LL WORK TOGETHER...

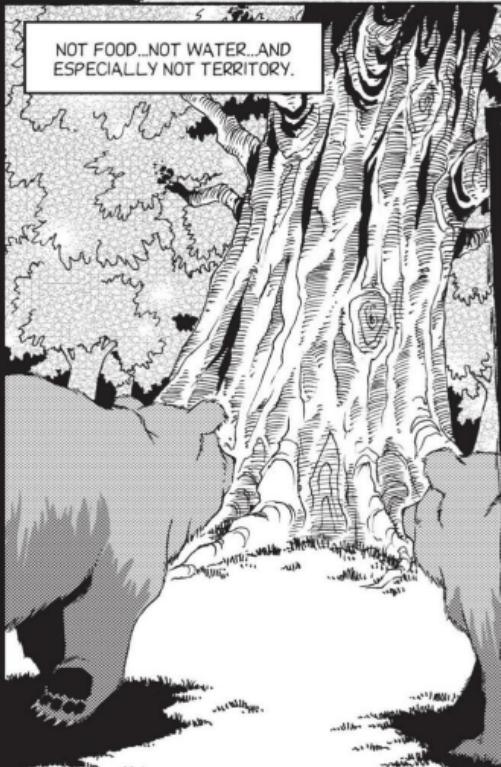
...AND THERE WON'T BE  
ANYTHING WE CAN'T DO.

WE'LL SHARE  
WHAT WE KILL, TOO.

MOTHER SAYS GROWN-UP BEARS LIKE US DON'T SHARE THINGS.



NOT FOOD...NOT WATER...AND  
ESPECIALLY NOT TERRITORY.



BUT TOBI AND  
I WILL SHARE.

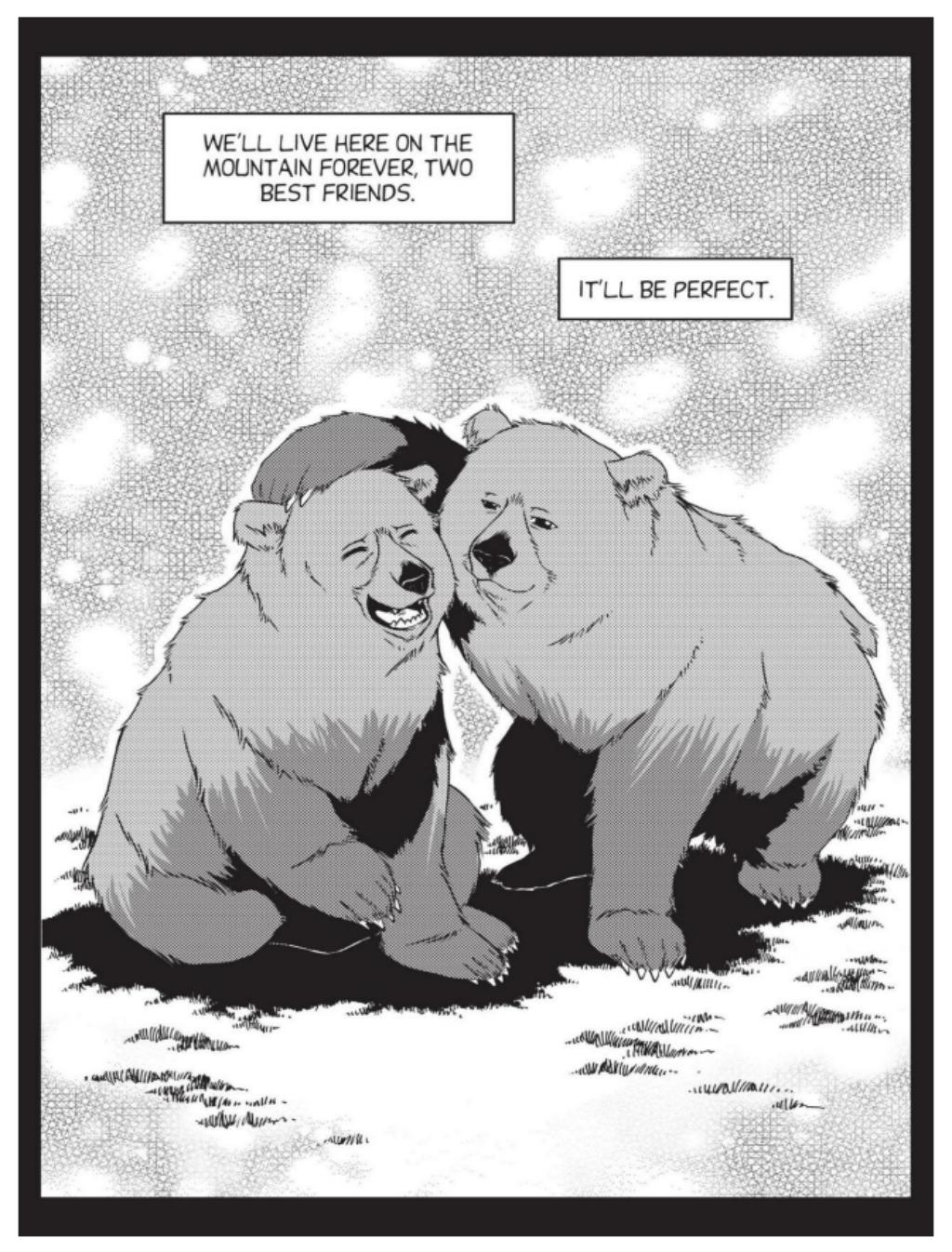
WE'LL STICK  
TOGETHER BECAUSE  
WE'RE BROTHERS,  
AND NOTHING CAN  
CHANGE THAT!

THIS IS OUR TERRITORY.

IT'S GONNA  
BE SO GREAT.

JUST THE  
TWO OF US...

...LOOKING OUT  
FOR EACH OTHER...



WE'LL LIVE HERE ON THE  
MOUNTAIN FOREVER, TWO  
BEST FRIENDS.

IT'LL BE PERFECT.



WAKE UP.

IT'S TIME  
TO GO.



HZZRRRH?



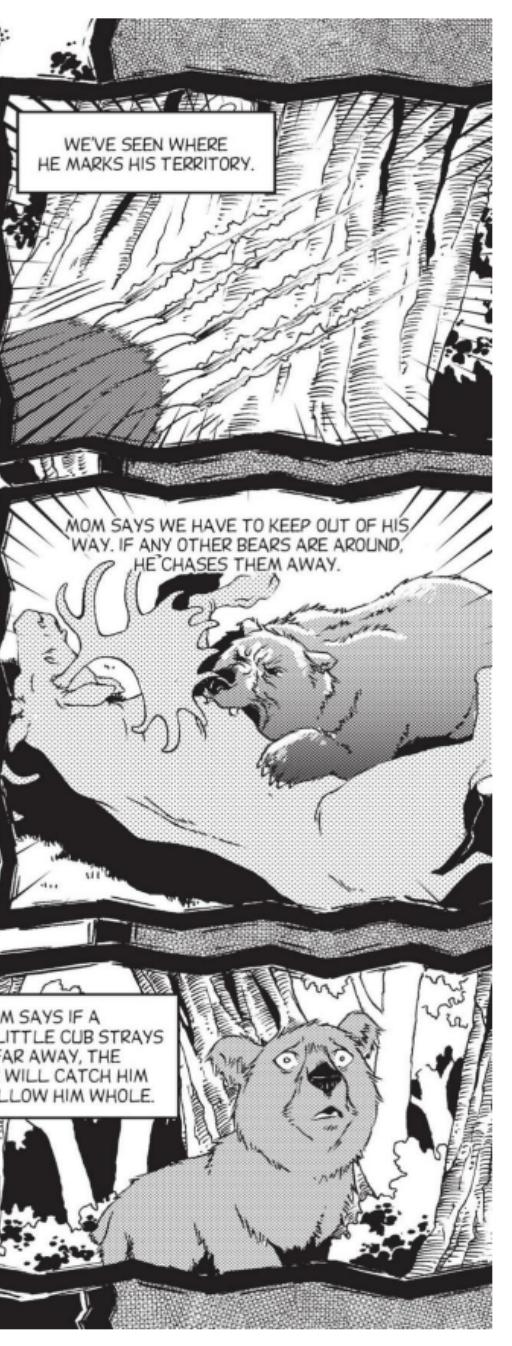
WHY DO WE  
HAVE TO LEAVE  
OUR CAVE EVERY  
DAY, MOM?



YOU KNOW WHY.  
THAT BIG BROWN  
BEAR DOESN'T WANT US  
IN THIS PART OF  
THE FOREST.



MOM HAS TOLD US ABOUT  
THE BIG BEAR EVERY DAY. HE'S  
LIKE OTHER GROWN-UP MALE  
BEARS—HE LOVES TO LIVE ALONE.



WE'VE SEEN WHERE  
HE MARKS HIS TERRITORY.



MOM SAYS WE HAVE TO KEEP OUT OF HIS  
WAY. IF ANY OTHER BEARS ARE AROUND,  
HE CHASES THEM AWAY.



MOM SAYS IF A  
NAUGHTY LITTLE CUB STRAYS  
TOO FAR AWAY, THE  
BIG BEAR WILL CATCH HIM  
AND SWALLOW HIM WHOLE.



WE'VE NEVER SEEN THE  
BIG BEAR. HE SOUNDS  
SO STRONG, AND SO  
POWERFUL...BUT REALLY  
SCARY, TOO.



SO EVERY DAY, WE  
HAVE TO MAKE SURE  
HE DOESN'T FIND US.

TOBI. COME ON.  
TIME TO GO.



I DON'T  
WANNA.



CAN'T WE JUST  
STAY HERE  
TODAY?



...BUT I GUESS  
I CAN PLAY WITH YOU  
INSTEAD!



HA HA HA!

THAT'S  
THE SPIRIT!



DON'T GO  
FAR, YOU TWO.

I'LL HAVE  
SOME BULBS FOR  
YOU TO EAT IN A MOMENT.  
THEN WE'LL NEED  
TO GET GOING.



TOBI AND I LIKE TO  
PLAY PRETEND A LOT.

LIKE WE MAKE  
BELIEVE THIS  
SPIDER IS A  
HUGE DEER...

...AND THIS BUTTERFLY IS AN EAGLE.

WHEN WE'RE GROWN  
UP WE'LL HAVE TERRITORY  
OF OUR OWN. WE WON'T  
BE PUSHED AROUND  
BY OTHER BEARS.

YEAH...AND WE'LL  
HUNT DEER AND MOOSE.  
AND GREAT BIG  
BUTTERFLIES!

WHEN WE HAVE  
OUR OWN TERRITORY,  
WE CAN LET MAMA BEARS  
STAY THERE, TOO!

HMM...OKAY.  
BUT ONLY IF THEY DON'T  
EAT ALL OUR PREY!

WE'RE GOING  
DOWN TO THE FIELD,  
MOM!

WE LIKE THIS FIELD, EVEN  
THOUGH IT'S NEAR A FLAT-FACE  
DEN. MOM SAYS THE BIG BEAR  
WON'T BOTHER US HERE.

ALL RIGHT.  
HERE, EAT SOME OF  
THESE FIRST.

I'LL BE  
THERE SOON.

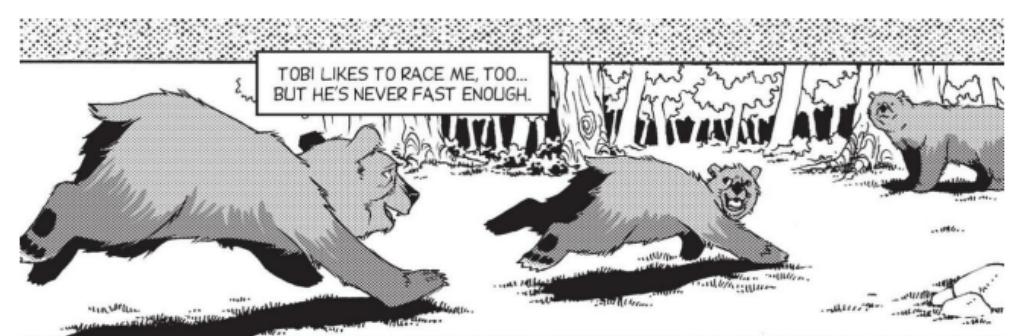


I WISH WE COULD JUST LIVE HERE ALL THE  
TIME, BUT MOM SAYS THERE ISN'T ENOUGH  
FOOD IN THIS ONE SPOT.

THAT'S  
TOO BAD...

...'CAUSE IT'S A LOT OF FUN,  
RACING THESE BIG LONGLEGS.





Tobi likes to race me, too...  
but he's never fast enough.



Sometimes I help  
him a little.



I can tell mom knows  
I let him win, but she  
never says anything.



I'm glad.



One day, cubs,  
when you're both a  
little bigger, we'll all  
go on a journey and find  
new territory.

It'll be a big and  
exciting adventure.

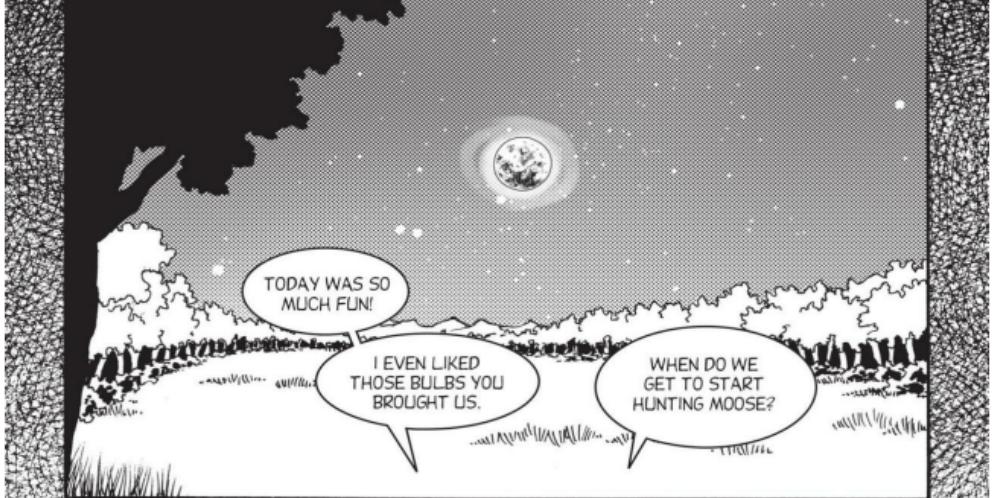
WE'LL ALL BE-  
-OH!

TIME TO GO, CUBS.  
HERE COMES A  
FLAT-FACE.



I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT  
THE FLAT-FACES. JUST THAT  
WE KEEP CLEAR OF THEM.

THEY SURE ARE  
WEIRD LOOKING.



TODAY WAS SO MUCH FUN!

I EVEN LIKED THOSE BULBS YOU BROUGHT US.

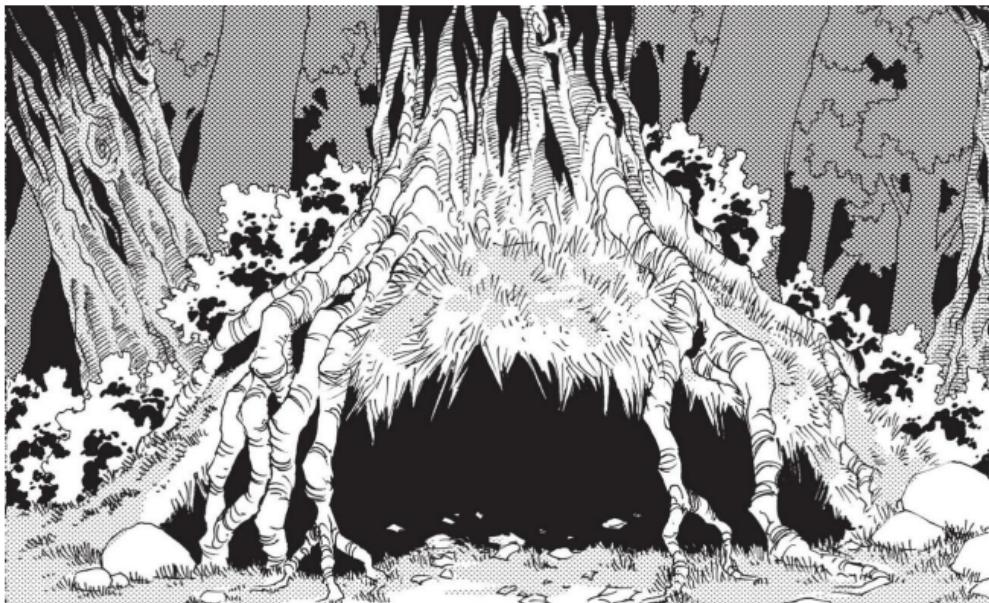
WHEN DO WE GET TO START HUNTING MOOSE?



I'LL... SHOW YOU HOW TO HUNT WHEN YOU'RE BIG ENOUGH, TOKLO. THERE'S NO NEED TO GET AHEAD OF YOUR--

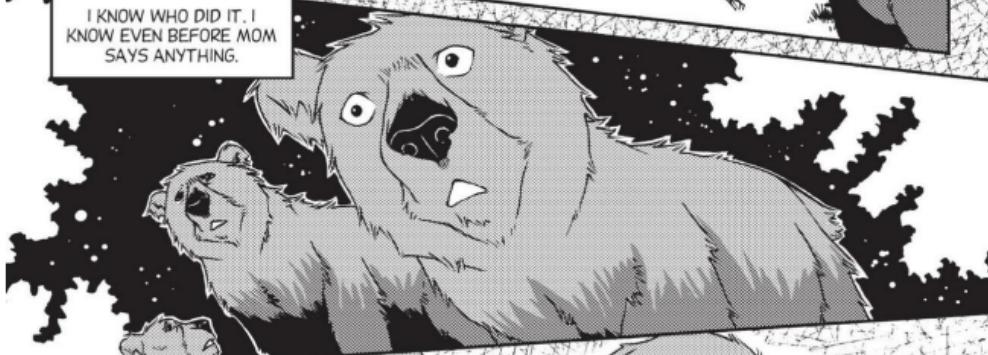


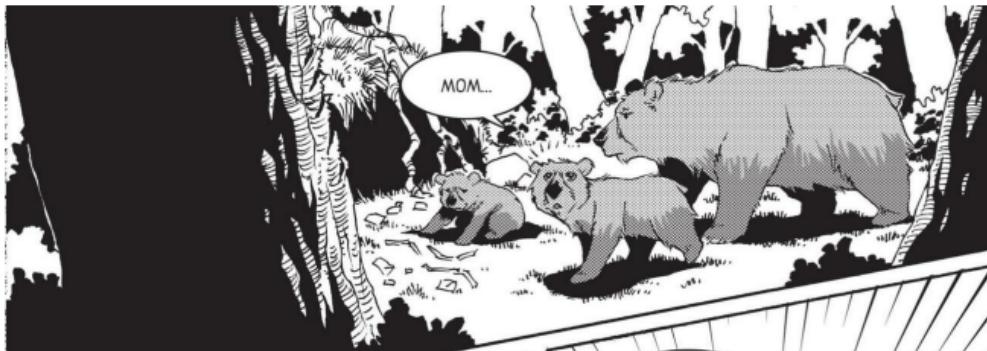
OH NO...





I KNOW WHO DID IT. I  
KNOW EVEN BEFORE MOM  
SAYS ANYTHING.





YES.

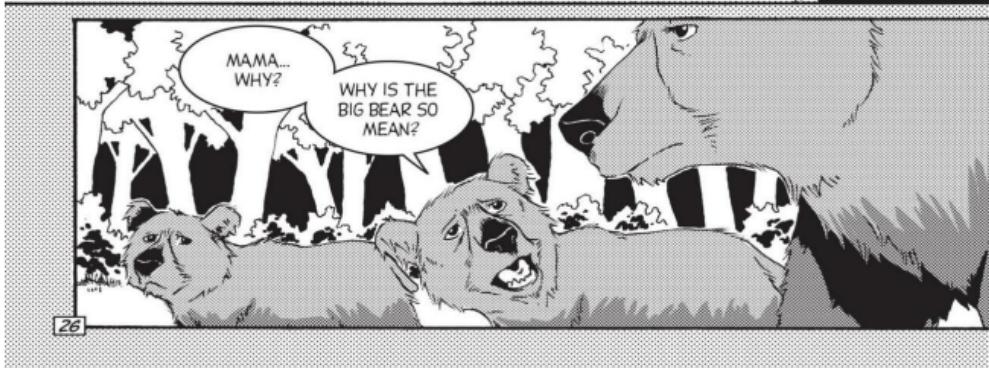
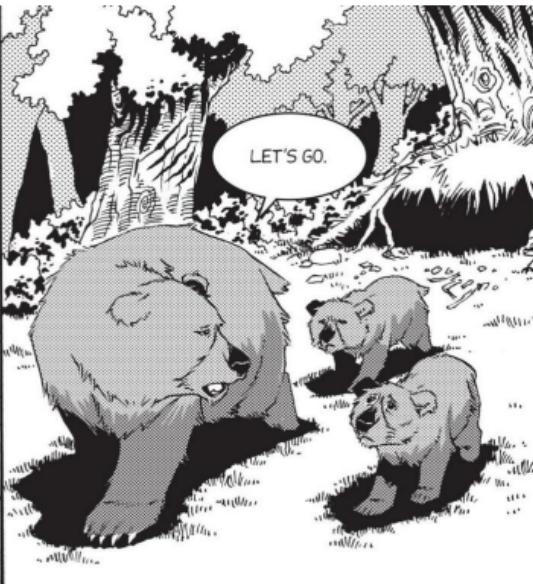
SO...WHERE  
ARE WE GOING?

UNTIL NOW, THE BIG BEAR  
WAS JUST A STORY. SOMETHING  
MOM TOLD US TO FRIGHTEN  
US INTO BEHAVING.

BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN  
HE'S REAL. VERY REAL.

WE'RE GOING  
ON A JOURNEY.







THE BIG BEAR...  
IS ONLY DEFENDING  
HIS TERRITORY,  
LITTLE ONE.

PROTECTING  
HIS PREY.





I ALREADY HATE NOT  
HAVING OUR DEN.

IT WAS FUN AT FIRST—GOING OFF ON AN  
ADVENTURE LIKE THIS—BUT NOW IT'S  
GETTING COLD.

HRRM?

TOKLO?  
ARE YOU AWAKE?

...I CAN'T  
FEEL MY PAWS...

DON'T WORRY,  
LITTLE BROTHER.  
I'LL, UH...

...I'LL THINK OF  
SOMETHING.



BUT WHAT? THERE AREN'T  
ENOUGH LEAVES TO MAKE  
A WARM BED, AND IT'S JUST  
GETTING COLDER.

MAYBE...



...MAYBE DIRT WILL HELP,  
IF I CAN JUST COVER HIM  
UP WITH IT.



IS THAT ANY  
BETTER?

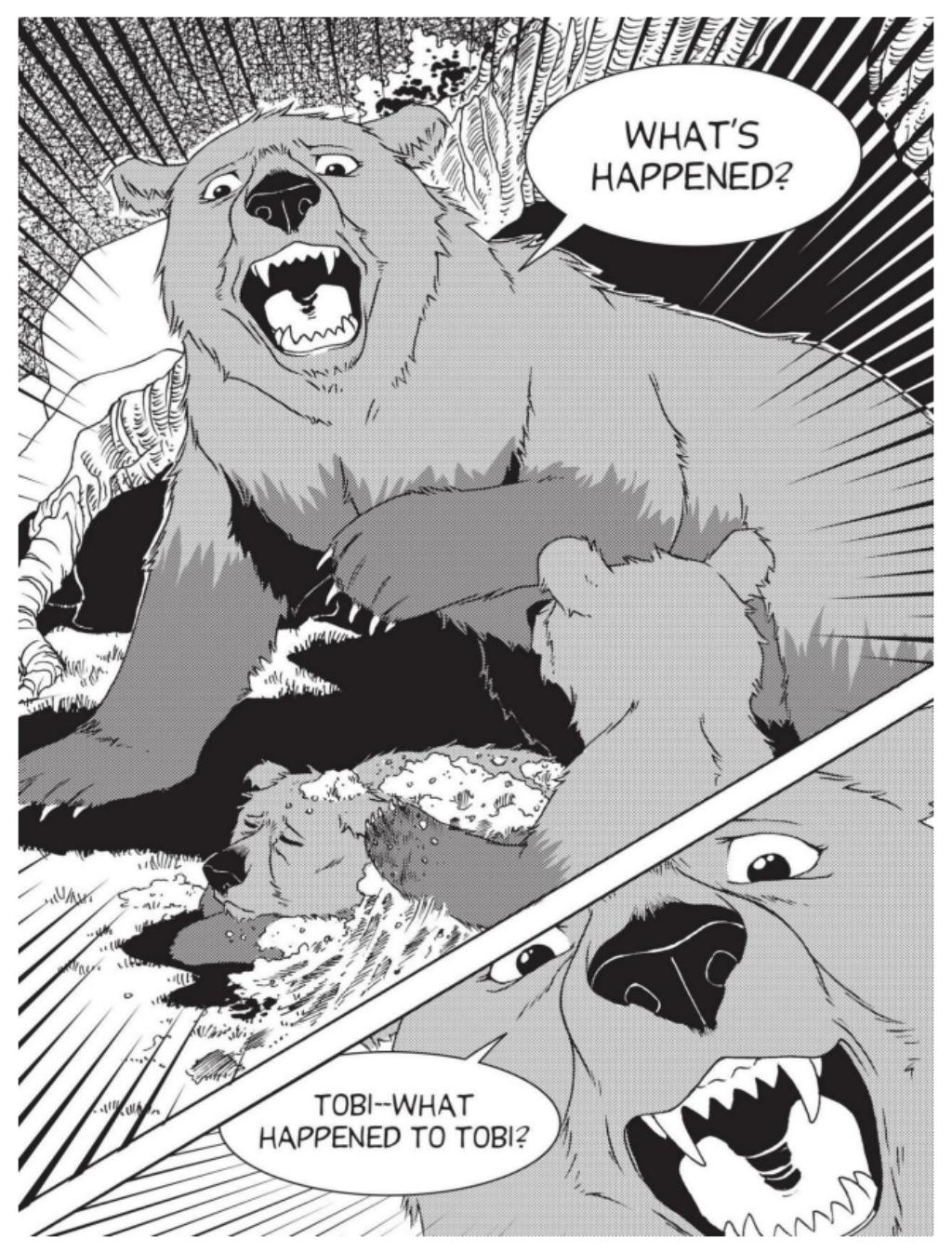


YEAH,  
A LITTLE.  
...THANK YOU.



WHUH...CUBS?

WHAT'S  
GOING ON?



WHAT'S  
HAPPENED?

TOBI--WHAT  
HAPPENED TO TOBI?



HE WAS COLD—

NO NO NO...  
I CAN'T LET THIS HAPPEN  
AGAIN! I CAN'T—I WON'T  
LOSE ANOTHER ONE!

MOM—MOM,  
WHAT ARE YOU  
TALKING ABOUT?  
I WAS JUST TRYING TO  
HELP TOBI GET  
WARM!

YOU DON'T  
UNDERSTAND!

THIS IS WHAT  
BROWN BEARS DO  
WHEN...WHEN...

OH, BUT  
YOU'RE, YOU'RE  
ALIVE.

YOU'RE ALIVE,  
MY LITTLE CUB.

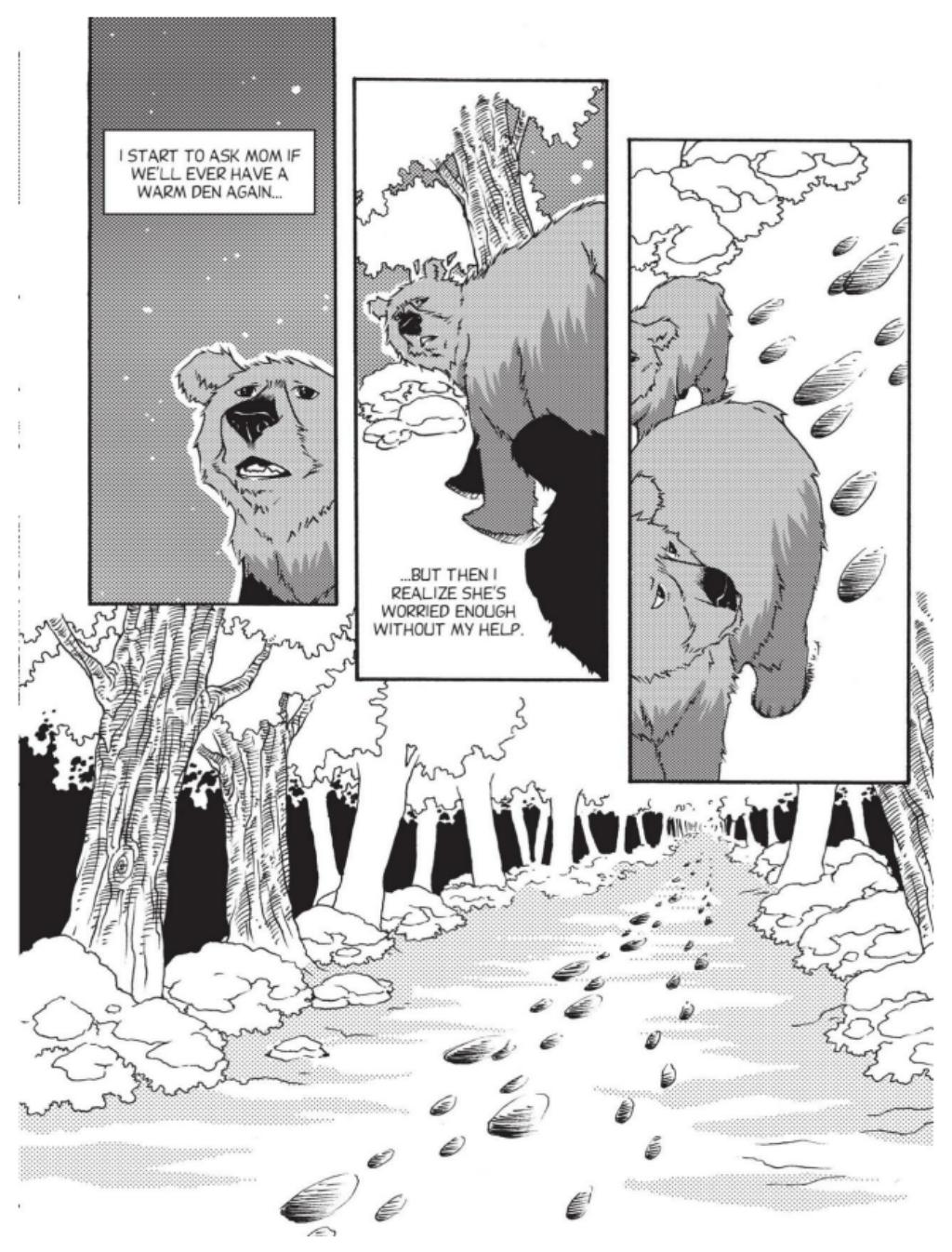
AND YOU'RE ALL  
DIRTY. LOOK AT YOU!

I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY MOM GOT SO MAD AT ME. SHE SAID A BUNCH OF THINGS THAT DIDN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

BUT WE'RE ON THE MOVE AGAIN...AND EVEN THOUGH WE'RE TIRED AND HUNGRY, AT LEAST WHILE WE'RE MOVING WE'RE NOT SO COLD.

WE'VE ALWAYS LOVED PLAYING IN THE SNOW BEFORE. BUT THE SNOW'S NO FUN NOW.

ESPECIALLY WITH NO DEN TO GO BACK TO.



I START TO ASK MOM IF  
WE'LL EVER HAVE A  
WARM DEN AGAIN...

...BUT THEN I  
REALIZE SHE'S  
WORRIED ENOUGH  
WITHOUT MY HELP.



IS THE BIG BEAR  
GOING TO COME  
AFTER US, MOM?



NO...HE'S GOT  
BETTER THINGS TO DO  
THAN FOLLOW US.



MOM SAYS THAT.



BUT I DON'T KNOW  
IF I BELIEVE HER.



I CAN'T TELL HOW LONG  
WE'VE BEEN WALKING. IT'S  
JUST SNOW, AND TREES, AND  
COLD, AND MORE SNOW.

BUT THEN...

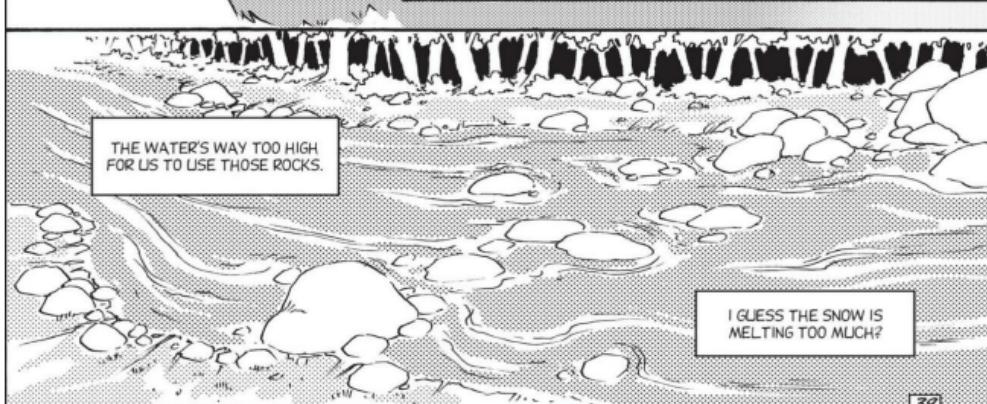
MOM?

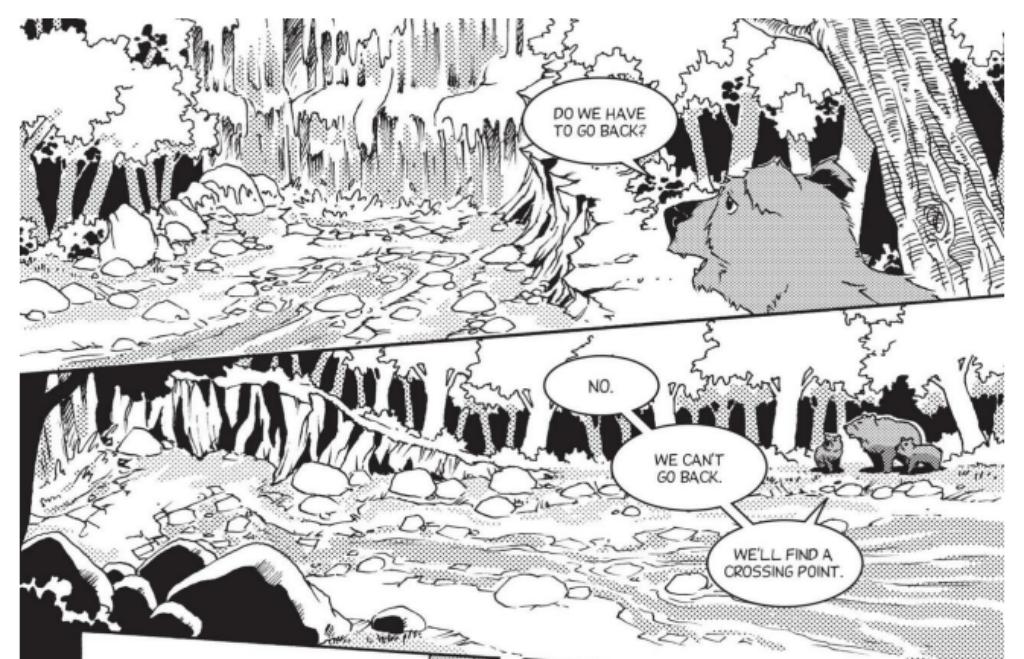
WHAT'S  
THAT SOUND?

IT'S LIKE  
THE WIND, BUT  
IT'S SO LOUD!

WOW.







DO WE HAVE  
TO GO BACK?

NO.

WE CAN'T  
GO BACK.

WE'LL FIND A  
CROSSING POINT.

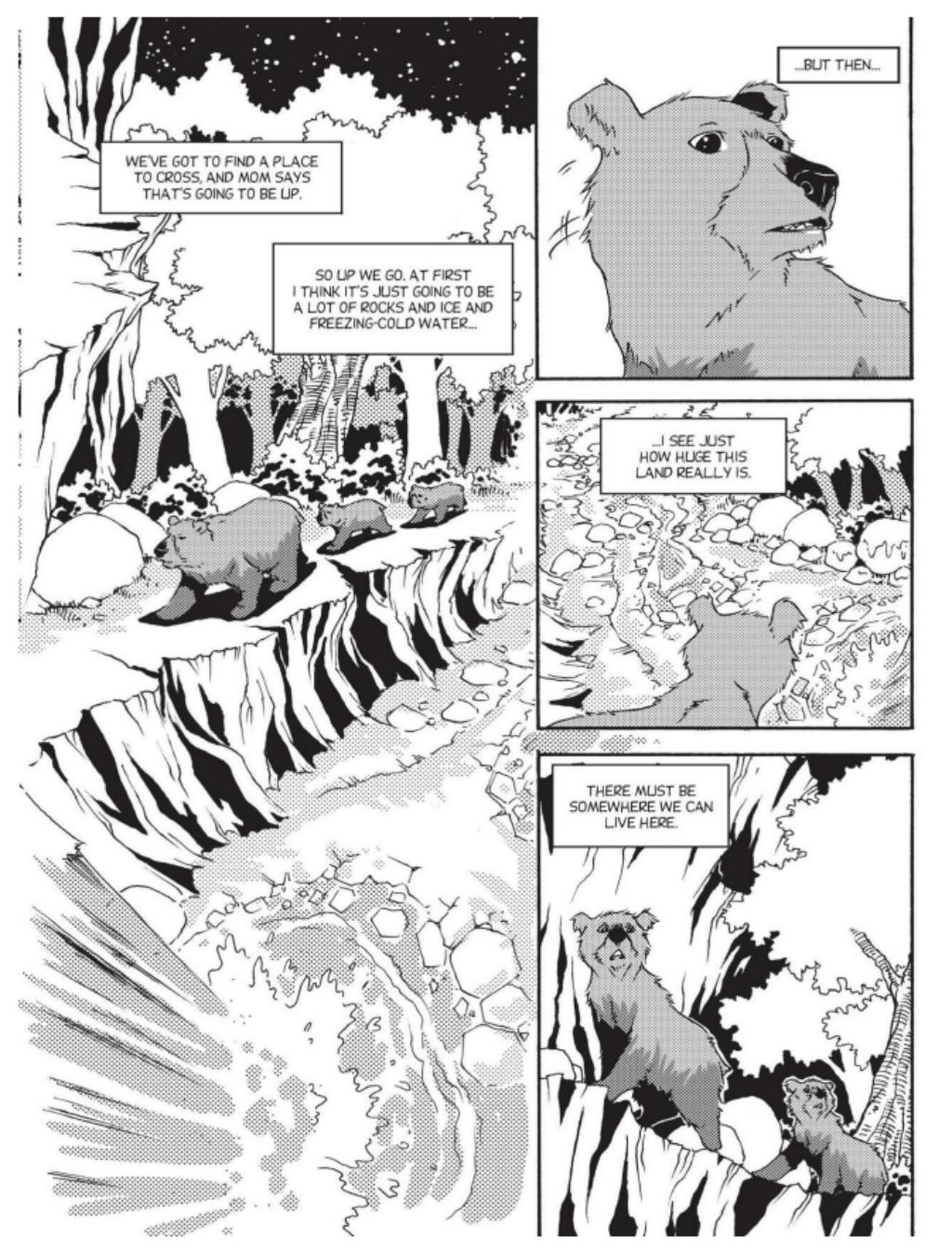


I'M GLAD WE DON'T HAVE TO  
GO BACK. THAT WAS A REALLY  
LONG WALK. AND THIS RIVER IS  
THE GREATEST THING I'VE EVER  
SEEN. IT'S SO HUGE!

YEAH!

I HOPE WE HAVE A  
WATERFALL IN OUR TERRITORY  
WHEN WE GROW UP. DON'T  
YOU, LITTLE BROTHER?

YEAH!



WE'VE GOT TO FIND A PLACE TO CROSS, AND MOM SAYS THAT'S GOING TO BE UP.

SO UP WE GO. AT FIRST I THINK IT'S JUST GOING TO BE A LOT OF ROCKS AND ICE AND FREEZING-COLD WATER...

...BUT THEN...



I SEE JUST HOW HUGE THIS LAND REALLY IS.



THERE MUST BE SOMEWHERE WE CAN LIVE HERE.

MOM, WE  
COULD CROSS THERE,  
COULDN'T WE?

NO, IT'S TOO  
FAR TO JUMP.

WELL, WHAT  
ABOUT THERE?

TOKLO...

...YOU'RE  
TOO SMALL.

YOU AND TOBI  
WOULD BOTH BE  
WASHED AWAY!

WE NEED TO  
KEEP MOVING.

UP AND UP AND UP...THE RIVER  
SEEMS TO GO ON FOREVER.

FINALLY WE HAVE TO  
STOP. MOM FINDS US THE  
BEST DEN SHE CAN.

AND FOR A LITTLE WHILE, JUST  
AS WE'RE ALL ABOUT TO FALL  
ASLEEP, I THINK WE MUST BE SAFE.

M-MOM...?

YES,  
TOKLO?

THAT TREE.  
...ARE THOSE MARKS  
WHAT I THINK  
THEY ARE?



RRRRHHH...

I WAS SURE WE  
WOULD COVER MORE  
DISTANCE TODAY, AND  
LEAVE HIS TERRITORY...

...AND WE WOULD  
HAVE, IF NOT FOR  
THE RIVER.



I TRY TO SLEEP.  
I REALLY DO.



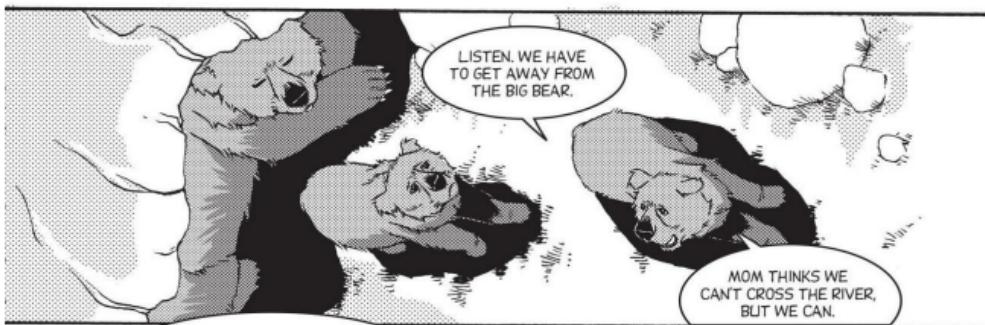
WELL, I DON'T  
THINK HE'LL BOTHER  
US TONIGHT. GET SOME  
SLEEP NOW.



IT JUST  
DOESN'T WORK.



TOBI...TOBI!









TOKLO!  
TOB!!

I'VE GOT  
YOU!

MAMA!  
MAMA!

HRRRHNH!



WHAT...ON EARTH...DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING?

YOU HAVE TO... LISTEN TO ME! YOU MUSTN'T GO OFF ON YOUR OWN!

SORRY, MOM.

WE WERE...I WAS... JUST TRYING TO HELP.

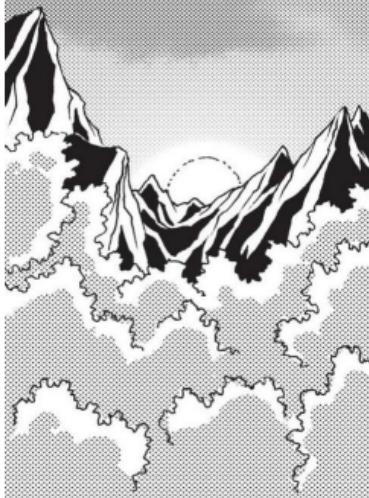
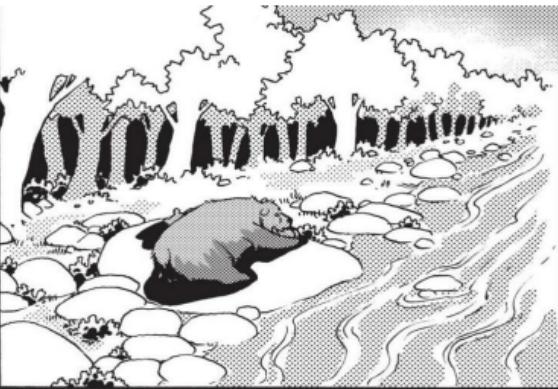
YOU FOOLISH, IMPETUOUS CUB!

THERE ARE OTHER STEPPING-STONES FARTHER UP THE RIVER, WHERE WE CAN CROSS SAFELY!

ALL THREE OF US ARE EXHAUSTED...MOM AND TOBI ESPECIALLY.

THERE'S NO THOUGHT OF FINDING A DEN.

WE JUST GO TO SLEEP, RIGHT THERE ON THE SPOT.





MOM...TOBI...  
WE'VE GOT TO MOVE.

TOKLO, WE'VE GOT  
TO REST. WE CAN'T  
TRAVEL LIKE THIS.

WELL, THEN LET'S  
REST UNDER THE TREES.  
THERE ARE VULTURES  
OVERHEAD.

OH...YES...YES,  
HAVE TO GET OUT  
OF THE OPEN...

ONCE WE'RE UNDER THE TREES,  
MOM ALMOST FALLS. HER  
LEG MUST HURT REALLY BAD.

I NEED SOME  
TIME, TOKLO.

I THINK MY LEG WILL  
BE FINE, BUT I HAVE  
TO REST IT.



I WANT MOM TO FEEL BETTER—AND, PRETTY SOON, I REALIZE I REALLY WANT SOMETHING TO EAT.



...BUT BEARS DON'T EAT LEAVES!



SHE HAS ME GATHER UP A BUNCH OF LEAVES...

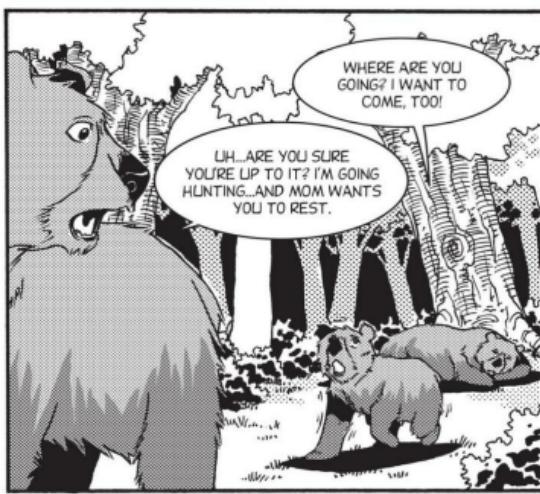
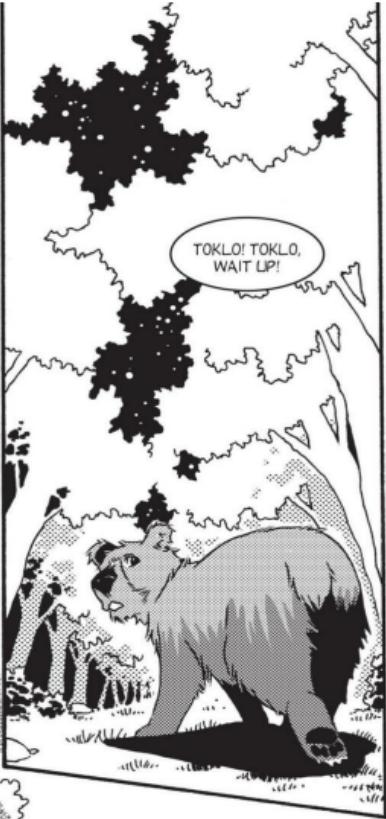


THESE ARE AWFUL!

THEY'RE NOT EVEN FOOD!









WALKING ALONG NEXT TO TOBI...  
FOR JUST A LITTLE WHILE I CAN  
SORT OF FORGET THE MESS WE'RE IN.



IT'S EASY TO  
PRETEND AGAIN.



TO BE THE KINGS OF  
THE MOUNTAIN AGAIN.

IT DOESN'T LAST VERY LONG.



TOKLO...!

LOOK OUT!  
GET BEHIND ME!



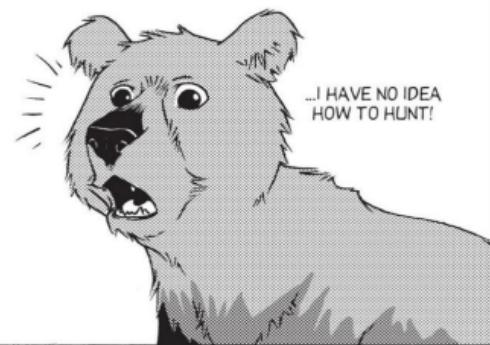
THAT WAS  
A BIG EAGLE!

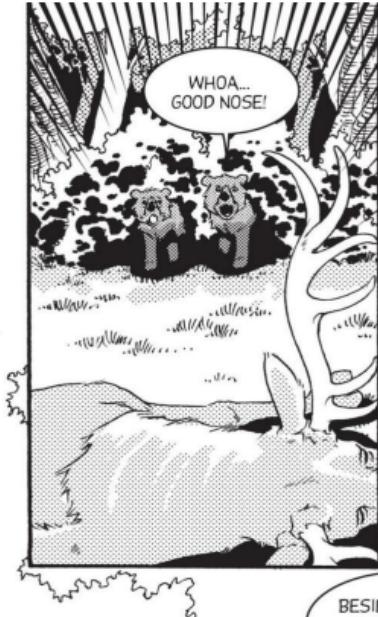
WHEW...IT WAS  
JUST AN EAGLE.





SECOND...





OKAY, PUSH!

GRRRRGH!

OKAY, PULL!

GRRRRGH!

WOW...THIS THING IS...  
REALLY HEAVY.

YEAH.

BUT IT WON'T BUDGE.

AND IT STILL  
WON'T BUDGE.

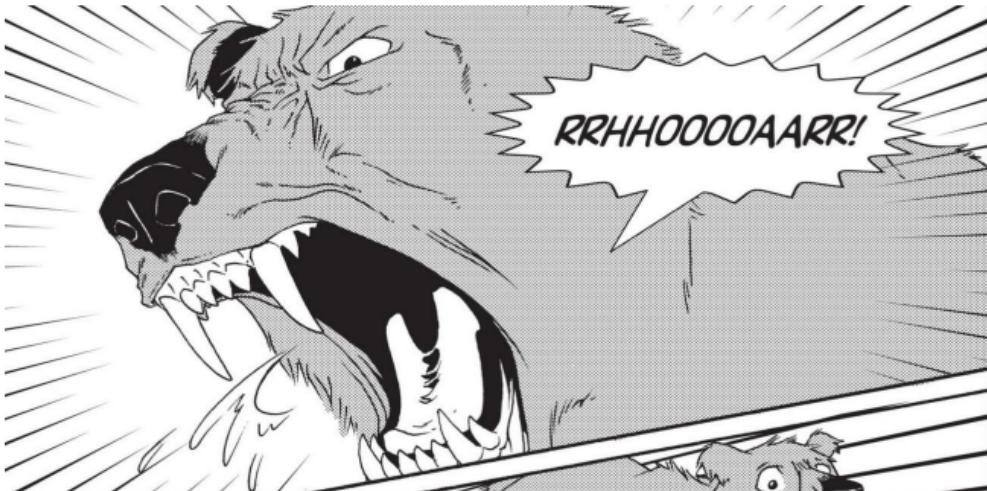
HOW ARE WE  
GOING TO GET IT  
BACK TO MAMA?

I'M THINKING.  
MAYBE WE CA-

GHHRRRRRRRRHH...

**GRRRRHHHH!**







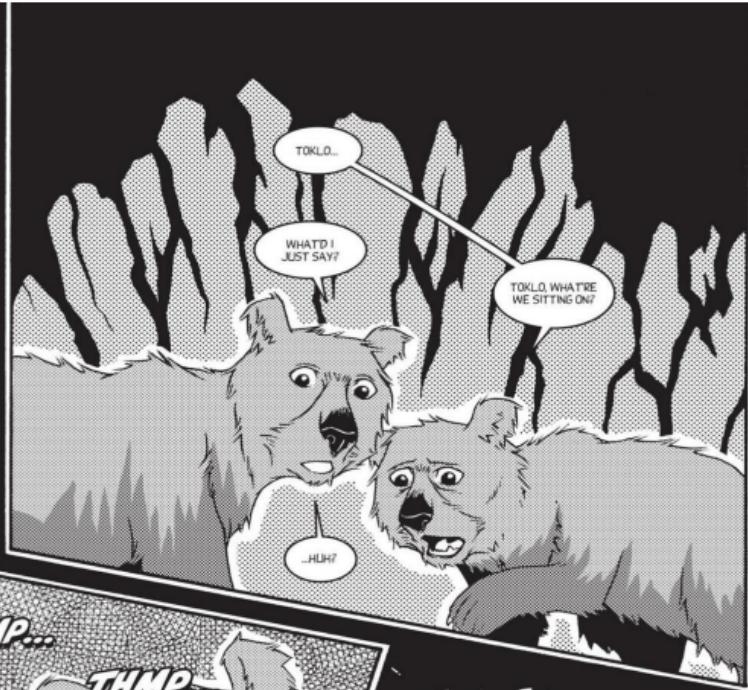
I'M...RIGHT  
BEHIND YOU...



HEY-LOOK  
THERE!







I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. EVEN WHILE I CAN FEEL TOBI SHIVERING, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.

OF ALL THE HIDING PLACES ON THE WHOLE MOUNTAIN, WE PICK THE BIG BEAR'S DEN!

BUT WHY DOESN'T HE KNOW WE'RE HERE? WHY DOESN'T HE SMELL US?

THAT'S WHEN I FINALLY UNDERSTAND. WHEN I FINALLY NOTICE.

THE BIG BEAR DOESN'T SMELL US 'CAUSE THE WHOLE CAVE IS FILLED WITH A HORRIBLE STENCH.

THAT'S WHAT TOBI WAS TRYING TO TELL ME.

THE FLOOR OF THE DEN IS COVERED WITH BONES.

TOKLO!

SHH! HE'LL  
HEAR YOU!

BUT...WHAT  
IF THEY'RE THE BONES  
OF OTHER BEARS?

YOU HAVE  
TO BE QUIET!

BUT THE  
SMELL...IT'S SO  
BAD...I CAN'T--

KOFF!

WHO'S  
THERE?

RRRH?

I KNOW I HAVE TO DO  
SOMETHING. WE'RE IN THE BIG  
BEAR'S DEN--HE'S GOING TO FIND  
US. BUT WHILE I'M TRYING TO  
FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO...

...TOBI DOES SOMETHING  
I DON'T EXPECT AT ALL.

I'M HERE.

ME.

MY NAME'S  
TOBI.

YOU AGAIN.

WHERE'S THE  
OTHER ONE? THERE  
WERE TWO OF YOU.

TOBI'S BEING SO BRAVE-BRAVER THAN I AM, I GUESS-BUT I CAN'T LET HIM FACE THE BIG BEAR ALONE. I WON'T.

IT'S JUST ME. I DIDN'T MEAN ANY HARM. I WAS JUST SHELTERING.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

THAT'S A LIE, TOBI. IT'S NOT JUST YOU.

THERE'S ME, TOO!

WE WERE TRYING TO LEAVE YOUR TERRITORY, WE PROMISE, BUT OUR MOM, HER NAME'S OKA, SHE'S HURT.

YOU'RE OKA'S  
CUBS?



BUT YOU LEAVE MY  
TERRITORY NOW!

IF I SEE  
YOU AGAIN, I'LL MAKE  
YOU WISH I HADN'T!

YOU TELL  
YOUR MOTHER  
THAT!







YOU'RE SURE WE  
CAN CROSS UP  
HERE, MOM?

YES, I'M  
SURE.

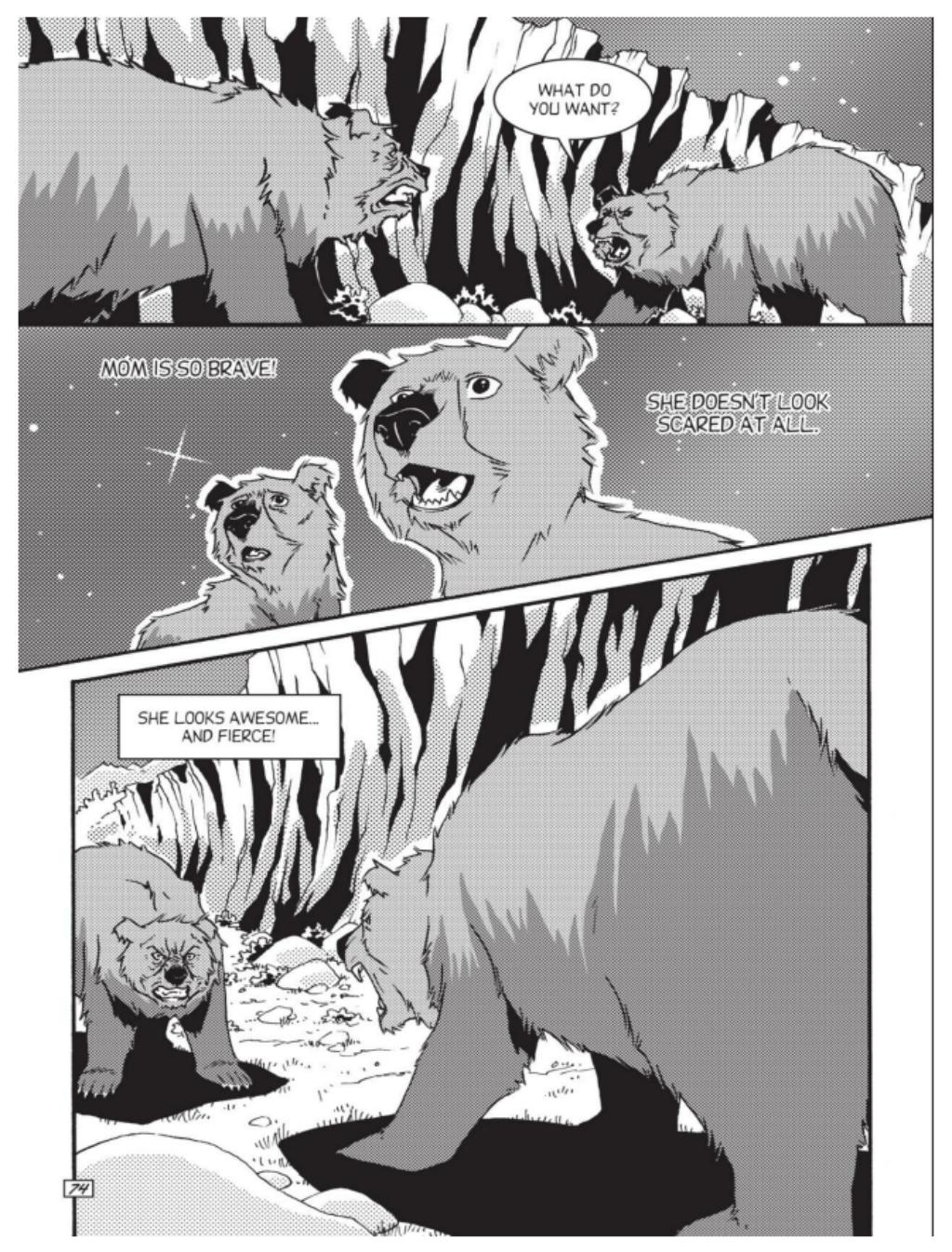
SEE, IT'S  
RIGHT UP-

GHRRRRHHHH...

BUT, MOM-

STAY  
BEHIND ME.

DON'T ARGUE!



WHAT DO  
YOU WANT?

MOM IS SO BRAVE!

SHE DOESN'T LOOK  
SCARED AT ALL.

SHE LOOKS AWESOME...  
AND FIERCE!

I ALREADY WARNED  
YOUR CUBS, OKA.

I LET THEM GO WHEN I...  
WHEN I FOUND OUT WHO  
THEY WERE...BUT THERE'S  
NOT ENOUGH FOOD FOR  
ALL OF US.

THEY'RE NOT  
JUST MY CUBS,  
REMEMBER?

THESE ARE  
YOUR SONS!

AND THEY  
NEED TO BE TAUGHT  
A LESSON!

I NEVER SAID YOU  
COULD STAY IN MY  
TERRITORY!



THREATS. ALWAYS THREATS.  
THAT'S YOUR ANSWER TO  
EVERYTHING, ISN'T IT?



WHAT ARE  
THEY SAYING? WHAT  
ARE THEY SAYING?



I DON'T KNOW,  
BUT...WOW! LOOK  
AT MOM!



WELL, IF YOU  
THINK, EVEN FOR A  
HEARTBEAT, THAT I WOULD  
LET YOU LAY A PAW  
ON THOSE CUBS...



...THEN IT'S TIME I  
KNOCKED SOME SENSE  
INTO THAT THICK SKULL  
OF YOURS!

THRACKK



UHLFF...

QUICK!

CROSS  
NOW!

MOM--YOU'RE  
COMING, TOO,  
AREN'T YOU?

JUST GET  
ACROSS!





I NEVER KNEW MOM  
COULD BE SO SCARY!



WELL...IF SHE CAN  
FACE DOWN THE BIG BEAR...

...I CAN PULL MY LITTLE  
BROTHER OUT OF THE WATER.



COME ON, TOBI...  
COME ON...I'VE  
GOT YOU!

KEEP MOVING,  
CHILDREN!



I'M COMING!





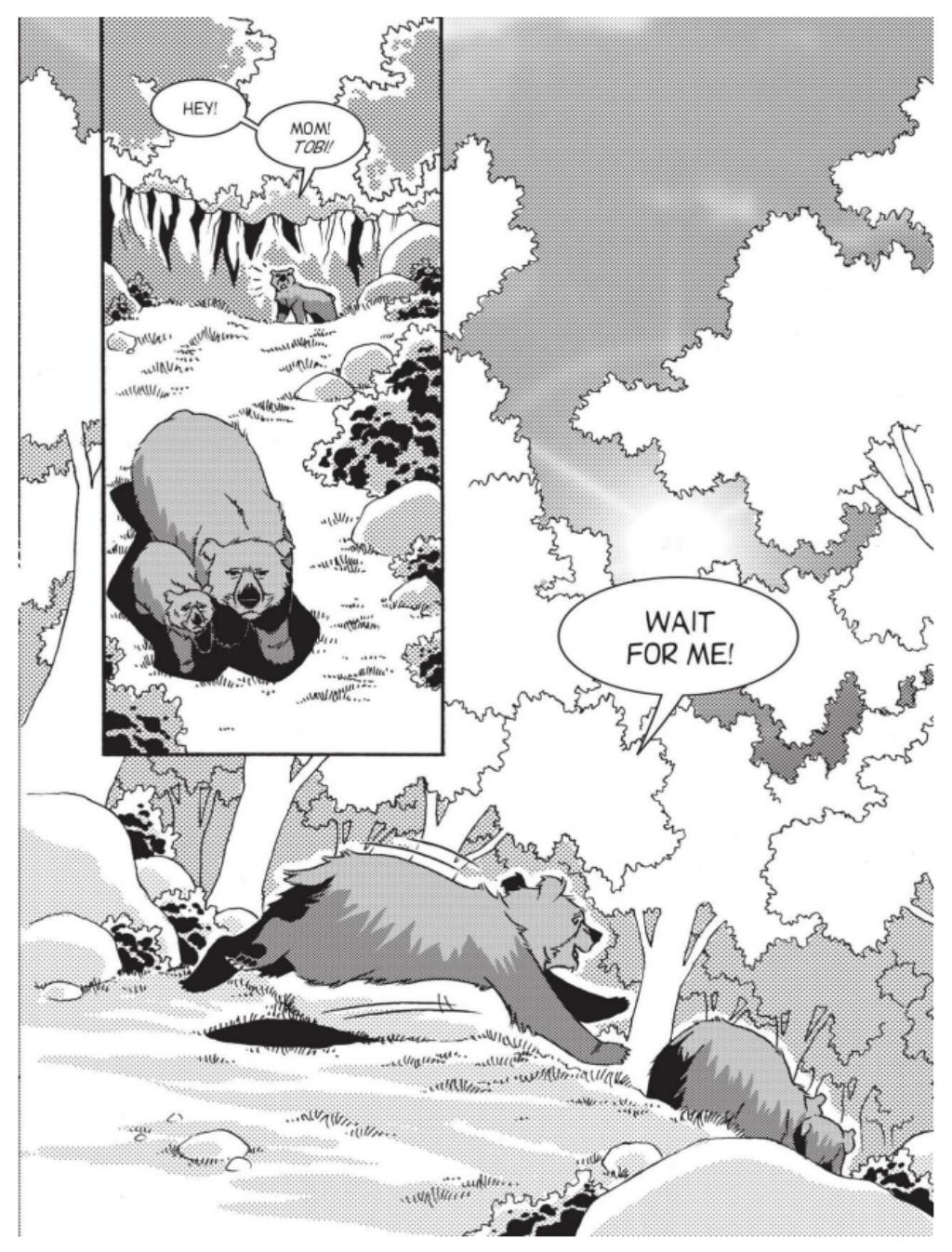


WE'VE FINALLY MADE IT TO SAFETY. FINALLY MADE IT AWAY FROM THE BIG BEAR. BUT IT'S THE CRAZIEST THING...WHEN I LOOK BACK AT HIM...

HE'S SO HUGE, AND POWERFUL. RULING OVER HIS TERRITORY...NOT AFRAID OF ANYTHING.

HE'S EXACTLY THE KIND OF BEAR I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP.





HEY!

MOM!  
TOBI!!

WAIT  
FOR ME!

# **ERIN HUNTER**

is inspired by a fascination with the ferocity of the natural world. As well as having great respect for nature in all its forms, Erin enjoys creating rich mythical explanations for animal behavior. She is also the author of the Warriors series.

Visit Erin Hunter online at  
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DON'T MISS THE SECOND  
SEEKERS MANGA:

# SEEKERS

KALLIK'S ADVENTURE

Polar bear cub Kallik and her brother, Taqqiq, live in a cozy den nestled into the side of a snowy hill. Their mother, Nisa, tells them endless stories of the outside world and Kallik and Taqqiq can't wait to explore everything. Nisa says they're too little to leave the den, but that won't stop them from sneaking out and having all sorts of thrilling adventures on their own!

TURN THE PAGE FOR A SNEAK PEEK AT

# SEEKERS

THE QUEST BEGINS

# SEEKERS

THE QUEST BEGINS



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Kallik*

*“A long, long time ago, long before bears walked the earth, a frozen sea shattered into pieces, scattering tiny bits of ice across the darkness of the sky. Each of those pieces of ice contains the spirit of a bear, and if you are good, and brave, and strong, one day your spirit will join them.”*

Kallik leaned against her mother's hind leg, listening to the story she had heard so many times before. Beside her, her brother, Taqqiq, stretched, batting at the snowy walls of the den with his paws. He was always restless when the weather trapped them inside.

“When you look carefully at the sky,” Kallik’s mother continued, “you can see a pattern of stars in the shape of the Great Bear, Silaluk. She is running around and around the Pathway Star.”

“Why is she running?” Kallik chipped in. She knew the answer, but this was the part of the story where she always asked.

“Because it is snow-sky and she is hunting. With her quick and powerful claws, she hunts seal and beluga whale. She is the greatest of all hunters on the ice.”

Kallik loved hearing about Silaluk’s strength.

“But then the ice melts,” Nisa said in a hushed voice. “And she can’t hunt anymore. She gets hungrier and hungrier, but she has to keep running because three hunters pursue her: Robin, Chickadee, and Moose Bird. They chase her for many moons, all through the warm days, until the end of burn-sky. Then, as the warmth begins to leave the earth, they finally catch up to her.

“They gather around her and strike the fatal blow with their spears. The heart’s blood of the Great Bear falls to the ground, and everywhere it falls the leaves on the trees turn red and yellow. Some of the blood falls on Robin’s chest, and that is why the bird has a red breast.”

“Does the Great Bear die?” breathed Taqqiq.

“She does,” Nisa replied. Kallik shivered. Every time she heard this story it frightened her all over again. Her mother went on.

“But then snow-sky returns, bringing back the ice. Silaluk is reborn and the ice-hunt begins all over again, season after season.”

Kallik snuggled into her mother's soft white fur. The walls of the den curved up and around them, making a sheltering cave of snow that Kallik could barely glimpse in the dark, although it was only a few pawlengths from her nose. Outside a fierce wind howled across the ice, sending tendrils of freezing air through the entrance tunnel into their den. Kallik was glad they didn't have to be out there tonight.

Inside the den, she and her brother were warm and safe. Kallik wondered if Silaluk had ever had a mother and brother, or a den where she could hide from the storms. If the Great Bear had a family to keep her safe, maybe she wouldn't have to run from the hunters. Kallik knew her mother would protect her from anything scary until she was big enough and strong enough and smart enough to protect herself.

Taqqiq batted at Kallik's nose with his large furry paw. "Kallik's scared," he teased. She could make out his eyes gleaming in the darkness.

"Am not!" Kallik protested.

"She thinks robins and chickadees are going to come after her," Taqqiq said with an amused rumble.

"No, I don't!" Kallik growled, digging her claws into the snow. "That's not why I'm scared!"

"Ha! You *are* scared! I knew it!"

Nisa nudged Kallik gently with her muzzle. "Why are you frightened, little one? You've heard the legend of the Great Bear many times before."

"I know," Kallik said. "It's just . . . it reminds me that soon snow-sky will be over, and the snow and ice will all melt away.

And then we won't be able to hunt anymore, and we'll be hungry all the time. Right? Isn't that what happens during burn-sky?"

Kallik's mother sighed, her massive shoulders shifting under her snow-white pelt. "Oh, my little star," she murmured. "I didn't mean to worry you." She touched her black nose to Kallik's. "You haven't lived through a burn-sky yet, Kallik. It's not as terrible as it sounds. We'll find a way to survive, even if it means eating berries and grass for a little while."

"What is berries and grass?" Kallik asked.

Taqqiq wrinkled his muzzle. "Does it taste as good as seals?"

"No," Nisa said, "but berries and grass will keep you alive, which is the important thing. I'll show them to you when we reach land." She fell silent. For a few heartbeats, all Kallik could hear was the thin wail of the wind battering at the snowy walls.

She pressed closer to her mother, feeling the warmth radiating from her skin. "Are you sad?" she whispered.

Nisa touched Kallik with her muzzle again. "Don't be afraid," she said, a note of determination in her voice. "Remember the story of the Great Bear. No matter what happens, the ice will always return. And all the bears gather on the edge of the sea to meet it. Silaluk will always get back on her paws. She's a survivor, and so are we."

"I can survive anything!" Taqqiq boasted, puffing up his fur. "I'll fight a walrus! I'll swim across an ocean! I'll battle all the white bears we meet!"

"I'm sure you will, dear. But why don't you start by going to sleep?" Nisa suggested.

As Taqqiq circled and scuffed in the snow beside her, making himself comfortable, Kallik rested her chin on her mother's back and closed her eyes. Her mother was right; she didn't need to be afraid. As long as she was with her family, she'd always be safe and warm, like she was right now in their den.

Kallik woke to an eerie silence. Faint light filtered through the walls, casting pale blue and pink shadows on her mother and brother as they slept. At first she thought her ears must be full of snow, but when she shook her head, Nisa grunted in her sleep, and Kallik realized that it was quiet because the storm had finally passed.

"Hey," she said, poking her brother with her nose. "Hey, Taqqiq, wake up. The storm has stopped."

Taqqiq lifted his head with a bleary expression. The fur on one side of his muzzle was flattened, making him look lopsided.

Kallik barked with laughter. "Come on, you big, lazy seal," she said. "Let's go play outside."

"All right!" Taqqiq said, scrambling to his paws.

"Not without me watching you," their mother muttered with her eyes still closed. Kallik jumped. She'd thought Nisa was asleep.

"We won't go far," Kallik promised. "We'll stay right next to the den. Please can we go outside?"

Nisa huffed and the fur on her back quivered like a breeze was passing over it. "Let's all go out," she said. She pushed herself to her massive paws and turned around carefully in the small space, bundling her cubs to one side.

Sniffing cautiously, she nosed her way down the entrance tunnel, brushing away snow that the storm had piled up.

Kallik could see tension in her mother's hindquarters. "I don't know why she's so careful," she whispered to her brother. "Aren't white bears the biggest, scariest animals on the ice? Nothing would dare attack us!"

"Except maybe a bigger white bear, seal-brain!" Taqqiq retorted. "Maybe you haven't noticed how little you are."

Kallik bristled. "I may not be as big as you," she growled, "but I'm just as fierce!"

"Let's find out!" Taqqiq challenged as their mother finally padded out of the tunnel. He sprinted after her, sliding down the slope of the tunnel and scrambling out into the snow.

Kallik leaped to her paws and chased him. A clump of snow fell on her muzzle on her way out of the tunnel and she shook her head vigorously to get it off. The fresh, cold air tingled in her nostrils, full of the scent of fish and ice and faraway clouds. Kallik felt the last of her sleepiness melt away. The ice was where she belonged, not underground, buried alive. She batted a chunk of snow at Taqqiq, who dodged away with a yelp.

He chased her in a circle until she dove into the fresh snow, digging up clumps with her long claws and breathing in the sparkling whiteness. Nisa sat watching them, chuffing occasionally and sniffing the air with a wary expression.

"I'm coming for you," Taqqiq growled at Kallik, crouching low to the ground. "I'm a ferocious walrus, swimming through the water to get you." He pushed himself through the snow with his paws. Kallik braced herself to jump away, but before

she could move, he leaped forward and bowled her over. They rolled through the snow, squalling excitedly, until Kallik managed to wriggle free.

“Ha!” she cried.

“Roar!” Taqqiq bellowed. “The walrus is really angry now!” He dug his paws into the snow, kicking a spray of white ice into their mother’s face.

“Hey,” Nisa growled. She cuffed Taqqiq lightly with her massive paw, knocking him to the ground. “That’s enough snowballing around. It’s time to find something to eat.”

“Hooray, hooray!” Kallik yipped, jumping around her mother’s legs. They hadn’t eaten since before the storm, two sunrises ago, and her tummy was rumbling louder than Taqqiq’s walrus roar.

The sun was hidden by trails of gray clouds that grew thicker as they walked across the ice, turning into rolls of fog that shrouded the world around them. The only sound Kallik could hear was the snow crunching under their paws. Once she thought she heard a bird calling from up in the sky, but when she looked up she couldn’t see anything but drifting fog.

“Why is it so cloudy?” Taqqiq complained, stopping to rub his eyes with his paws.

“The fog is good for us,” Nisa said, touching her nose to the ice. “It hides us as we hunt, so our prey won’t see us coming.”

“I like to see where I’m going,” Taqqiq insisted. “I don’t like walking in clouds. Everything’s all blurry and wet.”

“I don’t mind the fog,” Kallik said, breathing in the heavy, misty air.

“You can ride on my back,” Nisa said to her son, nudging him with her muzzle. Taqqiq rumbled happily and scrambled up, clutching at tufts of her snow-white fur to give himself a boost. He stretched out on her back, high above Kallik, and they started walking again.

Kallik liked finding the sharp, cool scent of the ice under the dense, watery smell of the fog. She liked the hint of oceans and fish and salt and faraway sand that drifted through the scents, reminding her of what was below the ice and what it connected to. She glanced up at her mother, who had her nose lifted and was sniffing the air, too. Kallik knew that her mother wasn’t just drawing in the crisp, icy smells. Nisa was studying them, searching for a clue that would lead them to food.

“You should both do this, too,” Nisa said. “Try to find any smell that stands out from the ice and snow.”

Taqqiq just snuggled farther into her fur, but Kallik tried to imitate her mother, swinging her head back and forth as she sniffed. She had to learn everything she could from Nisa so she could take care of herself. At least she still had a long time before that day came—all of burn-sky and the next snow-sky as well.

“Some bears can follow scents for skylengths,” Nisa said. “All the way to the edge of the sky and then the next edge and the next.”

Kallik wished her nose were that powerful. Maybe it would be one day.

Nisa lifted her head and started trotting faster. Taqqiq dug his claws in to stay on her back. Soon Kallik saw what her

mother was heading for—a hole in the ice. She knew what that meant. *Seals!*

Nisa put her nose close to the ice and sniffed all around the edge of the hole. Kallik followed closely, sniffing everywhere her mother sniffed. She was sure she could smell a faint trace of seal. This must be one of the breathing holes where a seal would surface to take a breath before hiding down in the freezing water again.

“Seals are so dumb,” Taqqiq observed from his perch on Nisa’s back. “If they can’t breathe in the water, why do they live in it? Why don’t they live on land, like white bears?”

“Perhaps because then it’d be much easier for bears like us to catch them and eat them!” Kallik guessed.

“*Shhhh.* Concentrate,” Nisa said. “Can you smell the seal?”

“I think so,” Kallik said. It was a furry, blubbery smell, thicker than the smell of fish. It made her mouth water.

“All right,” Nisa said, crouching by the hole. “Taqqiq, come down and lie next to your sister.” Taqqiq obeyed, sliding off her back and padding over to Kallik. “Be very quiet,” Nisa instructed them. “Don’t move, and don’t make a sound.”

Kallik and Taqqiq did as she said. They had done this several times before, so they knew what to do. The first time, Taqqiq had gotten bored and started yawning and fidgeting. Nisa had cuffed him and scolded him, explaining that his noise would scare away the only food they’d seen in days. By now the cubs were both nearly as good at staying quiet as their mother was.

Kallik watched the breathing hole, her ears pricked and her nose keenly aware of every change in the air. A small wind

blew drifts of snow across the ice, and the fog continued to roll around all three bears, making Kallik's fur feel wet and heavy.

After a while she began to get restless. She didn't know how her mother could stand to do nothing for such a long time, watching and watching in case the seal broke through the water. The chill of the ice below her was beginning to seep through Kallik's thick fur. She had to force herself not to shiver and send vibrations through the ice that might warn the seal they were there.

She stared past the tip of her nose at the ice around the breathing hole. The dark water below the surface lapped at the jagged edge. It was strange to think that that same dark water was only a muzzlelength below her, on the other side of the thick ice. The ice seemed so strong and solid, as if it went down forever. . . .

Strange shadows and shapes seemed to dance inside the ice, forming bubbles and whorls. It was odd—ice was white from far away but nearly clear up close and full of patterns. It almost seemed like things were living inside the ice. Right below her front paws, for instance, there was a large, dark bubble slowly moving from one side to the other. Kallik stared at it, wondering if it was the spirit of a white bear trapped in the ice. One that hadn't made it as far as the stars in the sky.

Taqqiq leaned over and peered at the bubble. "You know what Mother says," he whispered. "The shapes below the ice are dead bears. They're watching you . . . right . . . now."

"I'm not scared," Kallik insisted. "They're trapped inside the ice, aren't they? So they can't come out and hurt me."

"Not unless the ice melts," Taqqiq said, trying to sound menacing.

"Hush," Nisa growled, her eyes still fixed on the breathing hole. Taqqiq fell silent again, resting his head on his paws. Slowly his eyes began to droop, and soon he was asleep.

Kallik was feeling sleepy, too, but she wanted to stay awake to see the seal come out. And she didn't want to fall asleep so close to the spirit that was still moving below her feet. She flexed her paws, trying not to nod off.

Suddenly there was a splash, and Kallik saw a sleek gray head break through the surface of the water. She barely had time to notice the dark spots on its fur before Nisa was lunging headfirst into the hole. With a swift movement, she seized the seal and flipped it out of the water onto the ice. It writhed and flopped for a moment before her giant claw sliced into it, killing it with a single blow.

Kallik couldn't imagine ever being fast enough to catch a seal before it disappeared back under the ice again.

Nisa ripped open the seal and said the words of thanks to the ice spirits. Her cubs gathered around her to feed. Kallik inhaled the smell of freshly killed meat, the delicious fat and chewy skin. She dug her teeth into the prey and tore out a mouthful, realizing how hungry she had been.

Suddenly Nisa raised her head, her fur bristling. Kallik tensed and sniffed the air. A large male white bear was lumbering out of the fog toward them. His yellowish fur was matted with snow and his paws were as big as Kallik's head. He headed straight for their seal, hissing and rumbling.

Taqqiq bristled, but Nisa shoved him back with her paw. "Stay close to me," she warned. "Let's get out of here."

She turned to run, nudging her cubs ahead of her. Kallik sprinted as fast as she could, her heart pounding. What if the seal wasn't enough for the strange bear? What if he came after *her* next? As they raced up the slope, Kallik glanced back and saw that the bear wasn't chasing them. Instead, he was bent over the dead seal, tearing into it.

"It's not fair!" she wailed. "That was our seal!"

"I know," Nisa said with a sigh. Her paws seemed heavy as she slowed down to a walk.

"Why should that lazy bear get our meal, when you did all the work of catching it?" Kallik insisted.

"That bear needs to eat as much as we do," Nisa said. "When seals are scarce, you have to get used to fighting for every meal. You can't trust any other bears, my cubs. We must stick together, because we are the only ones who will look after one another."

Kallik and Taqqiq exchanged glances. Kallik knew she would do anything to take care of her mother and her brother. She hadn't seen many other bears, but when she had, they had been big and fierce and scary, just like the one that had stolen their seal. Maybe white bears weren't meant to have friends. Maybe the ice didn't allow it.

"We'll be all right if we stay together," Nisa promised. "There's food to be found if you know where to look, and if you're patient enough to catch it. So don't get your head all matted with snow about it. I'll be here to look after you until you're strong enough to hunt on your own."

She swung her head around to the left. “Can you smell that?” Kallik sniffed. She did smell something! But it wasn’t seal . . . it was something else. Something fishier, but not exactly fish. She didn’t recognize it.

“What do you think it is?” she asked Taqqiq. He was crouched down as if he was stalking something, and as she spoke, he leaped forward, pinning down a snowflake that had drifted to the ground. Kallik looked up and saw that it was snowing again. Her brother was happily batting at the snowflakes. It didn’t look as if he’d even tried to sniff for what her mother had scented.

“Taqqiq, pay attention,” Kallik said. “You’ll have to hunt for yourself one day, too.”

“All right, bossy paws,” Taqqiq said, twitching his nose dramatically from side to side.

“Come along, quickly,” Nisa said. “Try not to make too much noise.” They followed their mother across the ice, padding as quietly as possible. The scent didn’t seem to be moving away.

“Is it staying still?” Kallik asked. “Does that mean it doesn’t know we’re coming?”

“One way to throw off your prey is to hide your scent,” Nisa said. “Like this—follow me.” She led them to a channel of melted water in the ice and they swam across one by one.

“Blech, now my fur’s all wet,” Taqqiq complained, shaking himself as they climbed out the other side.

“That should make it harder to smell us coming,” Nisa said.

“And that big, old bear back there won’t be able to follow our trail, either, right?” Kallik said.

“Hopefully,” Nisa said, touching Kallik’s muzzle with hers.

As they got closer, the fishy scent got stronger, and Kallik could smell salt and blood and faraway ocean scents mingled with it. Soon she saw a dark shape lying on the ice. At first she thought it must be a giant seal, from the way the flippers were splayed out, but then she saw that it was the carcass of a whale. Huge chunks had been torn off it, and there were large bite marks and claw slashes in its side. The snow around it was covered in blood.

“It’s a gray whale,” Nisa explained. “Another bear must have killed it and dragged it onto the ice.”

Kallik stared at the carcass in awe. It must have been a very strong bear to overpower something so big and pull it all the way out of the water. Even with the large bites taken out of it, there was still plenty for the three of them to eat. Hungrily, she stretched out her muzzle and tugged a piece of meat free.

Nisa nudged her, making her drop the meat. “Don’t forget to express gratitude to the spirits of the ice,” Kallik’s mother said gently. “You must always remember that you are part of a bigger world.” She bowed her head and touched her nose to the ice. “We thank you, spirits of the ice, for guiding us to this meal,” she murmured. Kallik imitated her mother, whispering the same words, and Taqqiq followed. Then, with happy rumbles, they began to eat.

The fog had rolled away by the time night fell, and the stars shone brightly in a clear sky. Kallik sprawled on the ice, her full belly keeping her warm. Next to her were her mother and

brother. Not a hint of a breeze stirred the fur on their shoulders; for once, the wind had died down and the sea far beneath the ice was silent.

“Mother?” Kallik asked. “Please tell me again about the spirits under the ice.”

Taqqiq gave a little huff of laughter, but Nisa touched her nose to her daughter’s side with a serious expression.

“When a white bear dies,” she said, “its spirit sinks into the ice, lower and lower, until all you can see is a shadow under the ice. But you shouldn’t be frightened of them, little star. The spirits are there to guide you. If you are a good bear, they will always be there to take care of you and help you find food or shelter.”

“I’d rather *you* took care of me,” Kallik said with a shiver.

“I’ll take care of you, too,” her mother promised.

“What about the ice spots in the sky?” Kallik said, pointing her muzzle upward. “Aren’t those the spirits of bears, too?”

“When the ice melts,” Nisa explained, “the bear spirits escape and drift up to the sky on the snow-winds, light as snowflakes, where they become stars. Those spirits are watching you, too, only from farther away.”

“What about that star over there?” Taqqiq asked. “The one that’s really bright. I’ve even seen it in the daytime, once, and it never moves like the others do.”

“That’s the Pathway Star,” Nisa said.

“Why is it called the Pathway Star?” Taqqiq prompted.

“Because if you follow it,” Nisa said solemnly, “it will lead you to a place far, far away where the ice never melts.”

"Never?" Kallik gasped. "You mean there's no burn-sky? We could hunt all the time?"

"No burn-sky, no melting ice, no eating berries or living on the land," Nisa said. "The bear spirits dance for joy across the sky, all in different colors."

"Why don't we go there?" Taqqiq asked. "If it's so wonderful?" Kallik nodded. She felt a tingling in her paws, as if she could run all the way to this place where they would be safe forever.

"It is a long way away," Nisa rumbled. "Much too far for us to travel." Her black eyes stared into the distance, silvery glints of the moon swimming in their depths. "But perhaps we may have to make the journey . . . one day."

"Really? When?" Kallik demanded, but her mother rested her head on her paws and fell silent. She obviously didn't want to answer any more questions. Kallik curled into a ball in the curve of her mother's side and watched the ice shimmering under the moon until she fell asleep. In her dreams, bear spirits rose from the ice and began to dance, their paws light as fur as they romped and slid across the frozen landscape.

A strange creaking noise woke Kallik the next morning. It sounded like a bear yawning loudly, or the wind howling from underwater, but the air was still, and the noise came from the ice, not the sky. Her mother was already awake, padding in a circle around them with her nose lifted.

Kallik scrambled to her paws and shook herself. Her coat felt heavy with moisture, and the air was damp and soft instead of crisp and clear like it had been the night before. She turned

to her brother, who was lying on the ice beside her, apparently still asleep. She nudged him with her muzzle.

“Walrus attack!” Taqqiq bellowed, suddenly leaping to his paws and knocking her over. Nisa spun around with a snarl, but stopped when she saw that her cubs were just playing.

“Quiet,” she growled. “Taqqiq, stop acting like a wild goose. There is no time for playing. We have to get moving.” She started across the ice without looking back. Kallik and Taqqiq scrambled to catch up. Nisa’s grouchiness made Kallik nervous. Why would she scold them for playing now, when she’d let them roll around having fun the day before?

The creaking began again as they traveled across the ice. Nisa paused and swung her head around to listen. It seemed like the sound of the ice groaning and yawning underpaw was getting louder. Kallik could tell that her mother knew what this sound was—and that it meant something very bad.

Suddenly there was a loud crack and a horrible sucking noise, and Kallik felt the ground tilt below her. She was thrown off her paws and found herself sliding along ice that was no longer flat but sloped down steeply toward dark water. With a terrified squeal, Kallik scrabbled on the ice, her claws sliding helplessly on the slick surface.

A giant paw grabbed her and hauled her backward onto solid ice again. Kallik stumbled as Nisa bundled her away from the crack in the ice, where waves slapped hungrily against the new edge.

“Wow!” Taqqiq yelped. “The ice just snapped in two! Kallik, I thought you’d be swallowed up by the sea and we’d never see you again!”

Nisa hissed with frustration. Kallik peered around her mother's legs and saw that the ice in front of them had broken into two large chunks that were drifting apart on the sea.

"Already?" Nisa muttered. "But we've had no time at all on the ice! How are we supposed to survive on land if we can't hunt for long enough before?" She paced along the jagged edge of the ice, snarling at the waves that lapped at her paws.

"Mother?" Kallik whimpered. "What's happening? Is it . . . is it burn-sky?"

"It's too early for burn-sky," Nisa said. "But the ice-melt is coming earlier each season. We have less and less time to hunt." She chuffed angrily. "It can't go on like this."

"What do we do?" Kallik asked. "What's going to happen to us if the ice melts too soon?"

Nisa just growled, pawing the edge of the ice.

"Should we move to land?" Taqqiq asked. "Isn't that what we're supposed to do when the ice melts?"

"No," Nisa said, lifting her muzzle. "We must continue to hunt, or else we shall not survive the long, hungry months of burn-sky."

"But—" Kallik started, glancing at the surging water and broken ice before them. What if the ice all melted before they could get to the land?

"We must go on," Nisa insisted. "We cannot go to the land yet—or we will all die."

She moved off across the ice, and Taqqiq followed her. Kallik paused for a moment on the jagged edge, the dark water lapping

at her paws. She stared at the broken chunk of ice floating across the water from her. How far was it to land? Was there enough ice left for them to get there? And if there wasn't . . . what would happen to them?

# SEEKERS

*Book One: The Quest Begins*

*Book Two: Great Bear Lake*

*Book Three: Smoke Mountain*

*Book Four: The Last Wilderness*

## MANGA

*Toklo's Story*

*Also by ERIN HUNTER*

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*Book Two: Fire and Ice*

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*Book Five: A Dangerous Path*

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## THE NEW PROPHECY

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*Book Two: Moonrise*

*Book Three: Dawn*

*Book Four: Starlight*

*Book Five: Twilight*

*Book Six: Sunset*

## POWER OF THREE

*Book One: The Sight*

*Book Two: Dark River*

*Book Three: Outcast*

*Book Four: Eclipse*

*Book Five: Long Shadows*

*Book Six: Sunrise*

## OMEN OF THE STARS

*Book One: The Fourth Apprentice*



*Warriors Super Edition: Firestar's Quest*

*Warriors Super Edition: Bluestar's Prophecy*

*Warriors Field Guide: Secrets of the Clans*

*Warriors: Cats of the Clans*

*Warriors: Code of the Clans*

## MANGA

*The Lost Warrior*

*Warrior's Refuge*

*Warrior's Return*

*The Rise of Scourge*

*Tigerstar and Sasha #1: Into the Woods*

*Tigerstar and Sasha #2: Escape from the Forest*

*Tigerstar and Sasha #3: Return to the Clans*

*Ravenpaw's Path #1: Shattered Peace*